

Nathaniel Wilson House
(Albert Sidney Johnston House)
Harold Street
Washington
Mason County
Kentucky

HABS No. KY-126

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KY
81-WASH,
11-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NATHANIEL WILSON HOUSE
(Albert Sidney Johnston House)

HABS No. KY-126

Location: Harold Street, south of old Courthouse grounds, Washington,
Mason County, Kentucky.

Latitude: 38° 36' 56" Longitude: 83° 48' 29"

Present Owner: Mason County, Kentucky.

Present Occupant: Albert Sidney Johnston Shrine.

Present Use: Museum.

Significance: One of the early timber frame houses of Washington, this
nearly square clapboard structure was built ca. 1795 and was
the childhood home of Confederate General Albert Sidney
Johnston. The house also has been linked to Union General
William Nelson.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1795. The earliest record of this house located is a deed dated September 14, 1796.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a chain of title to the property on which the structure is located. Reference is to the Mason County Court Clerk's Office, Maysville, Kentucky.

Deed Book B-1	P. 541 --- September 9, 1795 --- Town of Washington to Nathaniel Wilson, John Coburn, and Basil Duke --- lots 25, 26, 28, and half-lots 23, 24. Wilson house located on south half, in-lot 23.
Deed Book C,	P. 508 --- September 14, 1796 --- Deed of Partition --- Division of lands between Tenants of Common. Mason County Commissioners to John Coburn, Basil Duke, and heirs of Nathaniel Wilson. In-lots 25, 26, 28 and south half in-lots 23 and 24 divided into 20 smaller lots. Lot 10 contains a "frame house" (the Wilson house).

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| Deed Book N, | P. 32 --- December 7, 1811 --- Heirs of N. Wilson Duvall Payne <u>et al</u> --- lots 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 (ref. Deed Book C, p. 508) deeded in trust to Mary Byers Johnston. |
| Deed Book P, | P. 179 --- October 20, 1815 --- D. Payne <u>et al</u> (trustee) to James Byers. (ref. also Deed Book P, p. 32 --- December 10, 1812 --- D. Payne <u>et al</u> to Basil Duke). |
| Deed Book 43, | P. 326 --- September 1, 1836 --- James Byers to Otway Peck --- Byers <u>et al</u> , including Clarissa Johnston, selling Peck the "same lots on which Dr. Johnston resided at the time of his death." |
| Deed Book 49, | P. 144 --- September 29, 1840 --- Otway P. Peck to Joseph Ganter. |
| Deed Book 55, | P. 65 --- March 5, 1846 --- Joseph Ganter to William Thurman. |
| Deed Book 69, | P. 303 --- July 20, 1863 --- (Sheriff's sale) William Thurman to Mrs. E. Taylor. |
| Deed Book 70, | P. 160 --- September 14, 1864 --- Elizabeth Taylor to Ruth Thurman. |
| Deed Book 81, | P. 510 --- April 13, 1874 --- David Wood to Frances Dobyns. |
| Deed Book 102, | P. 198 --- March 7, 1901 --- Frances Dobyns to Fannie Collins. |
| Deed Book 114, | P. 622 --- June 22, 1912 --- Fannie Collins to W. B. Lane. |
| Deed Book 123, | P. 147 --- November 13, 1920 --- W. B. Lane to Mattie and Susan Lane. |
| Deed Book 135 | P. 133 --- June 2, 1937 --- Mattie Lane to Mason County, Kentucky. |
4. Builder, contractor, supplier: In The Marshall Family (1885), p. 77, W. M. Paxton states that "Captain Nathaniel Wilson built the Dr. Johnston house south of the courthouse". Wilson himself may not be the builder; a carpenter-builder hired by Wilson may actually have built the house.

5. Original plans and construction: Since few or no plans of the house were used, the builder used traditional methods of construction. The building is of timber frame with brick nogging, which was removed during 1954 restoration, and has a Philadelphia townhouse plan, which consists of a side-hall and two rooms, each with a fireplace.

Interior partitions, of tongue-and-groove plank wall (possibly poplar) on the ground floor and plaster on the second floor, are original.

6. Alterations and additions: The main body of the house survived the years remarkably unaltered, though not well preserved. A porch and two doors on the west elevation are probably 19th century additions. Another porch was once attached to the house's south side, which was connected with a brick outbuilding, presumably a kitchen. The kitchen, a circa early 19th century addition, has since disappeared.

The house was restored by the Mason County Fiscal Court in 1954. All clapboards and rafters were replaced, and chimneys were rebuilt. Original materials were retained, however, depending on their condition.

- B. Historical Context: The house has been called for many years both "the birthplace of" and "the childhood home of" Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston (1803-1862). It is known that Johnston was living in the house by the time he was ten years old, but that he was born in the structure is open to question. Albert Sidney was the youngest son of Dr. John Johnston, an early trustee of the town, and his second wife, Abigail, daughter of the town's second postmaster, Edward Harris. Deed references show Dr. Johnston in possession of several properties in Washington at different times prior to 1812, and it is impossible to pinpoint his residence in 1803, the year in which Albert Sidney was born. Dr. Johnston never owned the property, although he lived there for many years, from about 1811 until his death in 1836. Abigail Johnston died in 1806, and in the same year, Dr. Johnston married Mary Byers, a widow. In 1811, the property was deeded in trust to Mary Byers Johnston. It is probable that Albert Sidney Johnston lived in the house as a child following the 1811 deed transference.

The house also has been linked to Union General William Nelson, whose father, Thomas, was a Mason County physician, who, according to one local historian, succeeded to Dr. Johnston's practice in the house.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house, restored and currently used as a museum, is one of the surviving early timber-framed houses in Washington. It has a side-hall townhouse plan.
2. Condition of fabric: Good, though not well preserved.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The house measures 36'-2" (three-bay front) x 32' 4". It is two stories high, plus a basement.
2. Foundation: Limestone, probably of dry wall construction.
3. Walls: Clapboarding.
4. Structural system, framing: The brick nogging was removed during 1954 restoration. Currently the frame is possibly of platform system with diagonal tongue-and-groove sheathing under the beaded clapboards. Joists meet a girder that runs perpendicular to them in the center of the house.
5. Porch, stoops: A limestone stoop is at the main (north) door, while wooden steps with railings are at the south door. A single-story porch runs almost the entire length of the west elevation. Access to this porch is by steps from both the north and south ends.
6. Chimneys: Two symmetrically-placed brick chimneys rise inside the west wall of the house. Each chimney is capped with two courses of brick.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: All four exterior doors are six-panel raised panel doors. The north (front) door has a three-pane transom window above it.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The operable shutters are in place, painted green and each has a single section of louvres. Second floor windows are all six-over-six double-hung sash while the first floor windows are all nine-over-nine double-hung sash,

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gable roof of the main house is covered with flat seam tin sheeting. The shed roof of the west porch is covered with mineral surface asphalt shingles. Louvered ventilation openings exist in either gable end.
- b. Cornice: Simple wood box cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: A small door (exterior) in the foundation on the south side of the house provides entry into a dirt-floored, two-room basement.
- b. First floor: From the main (north) entry door there is a long side hallway, which runs to the south wall, where a rear door leads to the exterior. A bathroom, a modern addition, is at southeastern corner of the hall, under the stair. The right side of the hall is punctuated with two doorways to the parlor and the dining room. Either the parlor or the dining room has a door to the exterior porch on the west side. Another door connects the two rooms.
- c. Second floor: A staircase on the left side of the hall leads to the south end of the second floor hall, which repeats the plan of the first floor hall, though the north end is partitioned off into a small nursery. Two bedrooms are similar in plan to the rooms below.

2. Stairway: The house has only one stairway, a straight run open-string stair with a quarter-turn at the top with winders. It is of wooden material.
3. Flooring: There are extremely wide wood planks throughout the house. The porch has modern tongue-and-groove flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are all painted plaster, except for the first floor wall between the dining room and the parlor, which is a painted tongue-and-groove plank wall set vertically.
5. Doorways and doors: Doors are paneled solid core doors in the first floor. Between the two major rooms is a six-panel raised panel door, while the door between two bedrooms has two long vertical flat panels.
6. Trim: Plain mantelpieces of natural wood enhance the four fireplaces.

7. Mechanical equipment: A modern gas heating unit provides heat from the floor in the parlor.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The front of the house (Harold Street) faces 5° East of North (275°). A sidewalk similar to the wider limestone sidewalk of Main Street runs along the Harold Street side.

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and
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PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

Two pre-restoration photos; one, ca. 1900, shows the rear (south) porch. Mason County Museum, Maysville, Kentucky. Copies of the photos are not included in the HABS collection.

A circa 1900 photo shows the east side of outbuildings south of the house, taken from northeast orientation. It is hung at the house, Harold Street, Washington, Kentucky. A copy of the photo is not included in the HABS collection.

Another circa 1900 photo shows the south and west porches and portion of brick outbuildings, taken from southwest orientation. It is in the possession of Mrs. W. W. Weis, Maysville, Kentucky. A copy of the photo is not included in the HABS collection.

B. Interviews:

June, 1975: Mrs. W. W. Weis, Maysville, Kentucky. Mrs. Weis confirmed printed information that during the 1954 restoration of the house papers were uncovered in the walls, bearing the dates of 1796 and 1797. She does not know what happened to the papers. Mrs. Weis is past regent of the Limestone Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution.

June 18, 1975: Mr. W. W. Catron, Washington, Kentucky. According to a story told to Mr. Catron (born 1898) by D. Maher (deceased) of Washington, Albert Sidney Johnston was "born in a log cabin across from the Presbyterian Church". The cabin has been used as a parsonage. The cabin burned and a house was rebuilt on the foundation. This story was told to Maher by his grandfather, William "Billy" Bracken, who had owned the property. This story's authenticity cannot be confirmed.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed books, Mason County Clerk's Office, Maysville, Kentucky.

2. Secondary and published sources:

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in co-operation with Old Washington, Inc. in the summer of 1975. Under the supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, a documentation of nine structures and one site was produced by Perry Benson (University of Pennsylvania), the project supervisor; Ronald Burch (Cornell University), the project historian; Mark Hall (Pennsylvania State University), Kenneth Payson (Cornell University), William F. Petell (Syracuse University) and Steven Shapiro (University of Maryland), student assistant architects. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress.